

My participation in sports has made me the person I am today

A good and happy day to all of you.

My name is Fjolla Shala and I am a team member of the Breiðablik football master division and I am an immigrant from Kosovo who arrived in Iceland in 1998 five years of age.

My parents are both from Kosovo where I was born and we moved to Germany when I was almost 6 months old. Football has been a major part of my life and in forming the person that I am today. I would say that football has colored all my life and made me in to the person that here stands before you giving this talk.

At the age of nine I started football training. Immediately during my first training session I knew that I had found my place. I immediately fell in love with that sport and it appealed to me as I was a very strong and energetic child in need of a lot of movement. My father was the initiator for me to start training football. He was himself a good football player and I admired him, he was my pillar and helper. I therefore went to my first training session because of my fathers stimulation to do so and that was a really great step for me.

Because my father had been a good football player he emphasized that I would train vigourously and that I would attend all trainings and train in full seriousness. He told me strongly to be a good and disciplined student and to do my best. I thought his demands were good and such stimulation is lacking today with the parents of icelandic children.

My father was behind me all the time and supported me in all ways regarding the football. But of course at the same time my parents were working hard to establish themselves here in a new country, and my parents often had to work long hours and could not participate as much as they had wanted. I therefore often needed transport to sports arenas or to events. I am very grateful to my first football club, Leiknir because the trainers drove me to and from the training sessions or helped me to get transport with the parents of other girls. They really supported me in making it possible to actively and strongly train and participate in my sport.

When I was a child one cannot say that I was an easy child. I had a very strong temper and often had a hard time controlling it. I was also quite aggressive on the football field, which the parents of the other children in the opposing teams did not really like. But when I was playing with the boys it was great to be agresive and decisive. However at the same time I sometimes got in to trouble, because I was a bad looser and often had problems in controlling my temper in such situations. And the trainers had to take me off the field sometimes and sometimes even the referees.

Around the age of 12 I started seeking friendship with children older than me and to be with some youngsters who were pehaps not the best company for me at that age. They were teenagers who were on a completely different track in life than me and they had an influence on me and what I was doing.

But at the same time the football was always there as an an anchor to keep me focused in life. And by attending all the training sessions and always staying in the football scene I managed to keep some balance despite becoming involved in various adventures. The football was what made me proud and most of my goals were connected with football. The footbal became my sanctuary and security away from everything else.

As I have mentioned, I was struggling with some problems outside the football and I had some problems with my life balance and priorities. The trainers were a great help to me and tried to assist me as best they could. They knew my position quite well and urged me to carry on because they had great faith in me. They tried to direct me the right way in life both on the field and also outside the sports arena.

It did not work to well out to train with the girls during my teen-age years because of reasons that I have mentioned here and my team the Leiknir decided that it would be best for me to train with the boys. There I felt much better and fully developed my skills.

I remember just like it happened yesterday when I was selected for my first national team assignment. There I got my first minutes with Iceland and I scored a goal immediately after I came in on the field. There I felt even stronger that football was my way. It was a great step in the right direction to have been selected to the Iceland national team. My family was so proud of me.

When I was 16 years old I moved on to Fylkir as Leiknir did not offer womens football for my age group and I needed to move up to a club that had a master team. There I met Bubbi, the trainer for the first time and he recieved me with open arms and gave me great discipline and the rules of life for which I am eternally grateful for and also for recieving me in this great way. In Fylkir there were also older players that I could look up to and admire who helped me a lot. At that time I had decided to try to find the right path in life and focus on football. A great thing for me also was that I was selected to play in the younger national team, the U17 and later in the U19. This was a great honour for me and a boost to my football career. I got to experience travels to many countries with the girls on the national team, something I would never have been able to do without the fotball.

When I was 19 years old I changed to the Breiðablik club in order to step out of my comfort zone and take on new challenges. I have been there five years now and become both the Iceland champion and the cup champion with Breiðablik. During this time I have completely changed from being a girl in to becoming a young woman.

I am so grateful for having had a lot of good people around me who believed in me and never gave up on me. My sports teachers, Úlfar Hinriksson and Stefán Halldórsson, my trainers, Þórður Einarsson and Davíð Snorri Jónasson in Leiknir and Bubbi in Fylkir and last but not least my father, Flurim Shala. They all directed me towards the training sessions and tried to help me on the right track in life and it can be said that football has made me in to the person that I am today.

In order to get foreign children to come to training sessions I strongly believe that lectures should be given on this in schools in many languages for the children and their parents. Explain to the parents how the stimulation payment assistance work, because the parents of foreign children think it is very expensive to participate in training football and other sports. There is a great lack of information to the parents how this work is done. Often the parents of many immigrant children are trying to build a new life here and do not have a lot of money. It is therefore likely that parents do not see a possibility for their child to practice a sport. Here I see the introduction to them of the stimulation payment assistance as being very important.

Then it is often so that foreign parents may just have come to the country and do not have a car and do not know the bus schedules. They do not know where the sports fields are nor where the training facilities are where their children have to go to train or to compete. Therefore some of them miss training hours or competitions and as a result the children may stop altogether attending the sport. Therefore the society must help the children to be able to attend training sessions and competitions and society must help the parents of immigrant children to integrate them in to the sports work and to help them to connect with the respective clubs.

Thank you very much

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